By Ellsworth Davis—The Washington Post

The Rev. Sun Myung Moon is greeted by followers as he arrives at Dulles Airport after tour of nation.

Controversy Ruffles Prayer Breakfast

1/31/74

By Marjorie Hyer
Washington Post Staff Writer
and William R. MacKaye

Some 2,000 youthful followers of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon are expected to ring the Washington Hilton hotel this morning during the annual Presidential Prayer Breakfast, apparently frustrating efforts by the sponsors to depoliticize this year's breakfast.

Mr. Moon himself, who has emerged in recent weeks as one of the staunchest defenders of President Nixon, returned to Washington yesterday from his current evangelistic campaign in order to attend the breakfast. His campaign embodies the slogan "Forgive, Love, Unite."

Congressmen and others involved in the House and Senate prayer groups, which sponsor the breakfast, have expressed dismay that the Korean clergyman was included in the guest list.

"As of two or three weeks ago, the committee had agreed that an invitation was not going to be extended to Mr. Moon," said former Texas Rep. Graham Purcell.

Neither he nor other committee members queried could say yesterday how that decision had been countermanded or by whom.

The annual breakfast has come to be a major social event attended by top figures from all branches of government as well as the diplomatic community.

At last year's affair, Sen. Mark O. Hatfield (R-Ore.), speaking for the Senate Prayer Group, issued a stinging warning that such gatherings constituted more civil religion than authentic worship of God and as such, verged on "outright idolatry."

As a result, this year's planning committee sought ways to restore the event to its original purpose.

Except for a White House pool, both the writing press and television cameras have been excluded from the breakfast this year "to help restore the lost devotional nature of the gathering," said John Rainbolt, assistant counsel to the House Agriculture Committee.

Earlier this week, press spokesmen of the Unification Church, as Mr. Moon's organization is known, issued a press release announcing their leader's invitation to the breakfast and their plans to field 2,000 demonstrators outside the hotel in support of their National Prayer and Fast for the Watergate Crisis.

Mr. Moon is not scheduled to speak and one member of the committee, who asked not to be identified, said, "I guarantee he will not be at the head table."

The Unification Church representatives, who maintain that their "Forgive, Love, Unite" campaign is "not political but spirtial," proved their ability to capture media attention last month at the lighting of the National Christmas tree.

Strategically seated in easy range of the television cameras and armed with banners and placards, they staged a noisy demonstration in support of the President just as he concluded his remarks.

Later that night, while they were gathered in Lafayette Park singing Christmas carols, President Nixon left the White House to thank them personally for their support and to give them a presidential Christmas card.

The singing, cheering throng stopped traffic momentarily on Pennsylvani Avenue to escort him back to the White House.

Last night more than 1,500 of Mr. Moon's cheering followers assembled at Dulles International Airport to welcome him as he arrived from Los Angeles.

Rep. Andrew Young (D-Ga.), who was not a member of the planning committee for today's breakfast but who has consented to offer a concluding prayer, was among those who expressed dismay over the plans of the Unification Church people to link their campaign to the prayer breakfast.

"I've always said there is no forgiveness without repentance," said the former civil rights leader, who is a United Church of Christ clergyman.